

Three Count®

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Janetty, Hughes, Hogan pinned by cocaine charges

By ALEX MARVEZ
Three Count Editor

The arrests of two prominent wrestlers on cocaine charges and accusations of cocaine use by the biggest star in the history of wrestling were the top stories in wrestling this past week.

World Wrestling Federation performer Marty Janetty was arrested Jan. 26 on charges of possession of cocaine, possession of drug paraphernalia and resisting arrest with violence. He was suspended by the WWF indefinitely Jan. 27 before a television taping in Lubbock, Tx.

Janetty, who made his niche in the wrestling business teaming with Shawn Michaels as The Rockers, was arrested by Tampa police at the Yukitan Liquor Stand, 4811 West Cypress Street. Janetty accompanied Angela Ialacci, 19, to the club at 2 a.m. Ialacci attempted to gain entrance to the club using a fake Florida ID card, prompting an attempted arrest by the police department. Janetty violently grabbed an officer, and was consequently arrested. Upon a search, less than one gram of cocaine in a twist-tied bag and drug paraphernalia were found on Janetty. Ialacci was also found with less than one gram of cocaine in a twist-tie bag.

Jannety, who turned 32 on February 3, was primed for a semi-main event feud against Michaels, as the duo recently underwent an in-ring break-up in mid January. Janetty, though, was reportedly set to join World Championship Wrestling in May as a tag-team partner to Shane Douglas. Should Jannety be convicted or plead guilty to the charges, he may be forced from the wrestling business. A similar situation faced Tully Blanchard in the fall of 1989, when he failed an in-house WWF drug test for cocaine prior to leaving the group for a reported deal with WCW. Blanchard was snubbed by WCW, reportedly because the group was afraid the WWF would release the test results to the public, and left wrestling.

The details on Hughes' arrest are sketchy, although it is known he was arrested in the Atlanta area for attempting to purchase crack cocaine. WCW reportedly suspended Hughes, but only for 15 days, at which time the situation will be reviewed. Hughes, the former in-ring bodyguard for WCW champion Lex Luger, was scheduled for a series of tag-team matches against Rick-Scott Steiner the next few months.

Former WWF champion Hulk Hogan was accused of using cocaine in 1983 by "Superstar" Billy Graham on Dan Reilly's Wrestle-Radio talk show in Springfield, Mass., January 18. Graham, a former WWF champion who also claims Hogan was a long-time user of anabolic steroids, told Reilly, "Hulk, right in front of me, offered me cocaine, and I said, 'Well, I just really don't feel like I need to start doing cocaine.' And he said, 'Good. You're smart, because cocaine is the worst drug you could ever imagine to get off of.' And

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Committee meeting scheduled for Feb. 7

By ALEX MARVEZ
Three Count Editor

A vote on a bill regulating professional wrestling in Florida will be held February 7 by the state's Committee on Regulated Industry.

The vote was to originally be held either Jan. 28 or Jan. 30, but Janet Clark, the legislative analyst whose research into wrestling spawned a bill, fell ill and had to be hospitalized.

The bill will be sandwiched into a busy meeting schedule by a sub-committee of the Regulated Industries heads, with a likely hearing time of 10 a.m. The bill will likely receive up to 30 minutes of floor time, because of a crush of pari-mutuel wagering bills on the agenda. The time spent on wrestling will depend on how much of the pari-mutuel agenda can be cleared in meetings earlier in the week, Clark said. The Feb. 7 meeting, by law, can also not run past 1 p.m.

Former WWF champion Billy Graham sent a five-minute video taped interview to the meeting expressing his support for the bill, because of its proposal for a mandatory anabolic steroid test. Expected to speak against the bill are IWF legal counsel Chris Qualmann and Sun-coast Pro Wrestling owner Henry Raines, both of whom are opposed to a five-percent regulatory tax in the bill.

Cocaine accusations

(Continued from Page 1)

then he proceeded to shove cocaine up his nose right in front of me."

The February 3 edition of the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter* said Graham's claim was backed up by two wrestlers who were on the same airplane as Hogan during the described incident. Hogan remains unavailable for comment on the matter.

"It was something that has been there in the back of my mind," Graham told *Three Count*. "It was something I felt was another betrayal. Drugs are drugs, whether the label is steroids or cocaine. I just wanted to bear the whole truth, put everything out and hold nothing back in all aspects of the story."

Graham also told *Three Count* of homosexual harassment he had seen in WWF locker rooms during his stay from 1986-89. Most of the accusations center around Pat Patterson, one of the WWF's match-makers, and Terry Garvin, a front office employee.

"It has been obvious there from the bookers for quite a while," Graham said. "There were incidences when they would approach a certain younger wrestler with a sexual compromise in exchange for an angle, and higher pay checks and placement on cards. It's common knowledge and has been documented. It's something that is intolerable."

"It's sexual harassment in reverse. It is amazing."

Graham, who has been the focus of mainstream media attention for his claims of widespread steroid abuse in wrestling, was interviewed last Wednesday at his Toluca Lake, Calif., home by 20/20. "I spent three hours with them," said Graham, who will appear on the show in a segment focusing upon wrestling and steroids in late February. "I'm happy with it. I think I was a little lax in my interview performance, but my wife and Dave Meltzer (the *Wrestling Observer* editor who spent the day with Graham) seemed pleased."

Results

Charlie Mattos attended a World Wrestling Federation show Jan. 20 at the Municipal Auditorium in Nashville, Tenn. The following is his report:

1. Jim Duggan defeated Nasty Boy Sags in 10:05. Sags tried, but Duggan is simply awful. Grade: D-

2. Randy Savage pinned Jake Roberts in 7:15. The match was pretty good while it lasted. Savage took one really nice bump over the top rope. Jake missed the DDT, and Savage cradled him for the pin. The post-match brawl saw Jake land the DDT. I'd say at least 30-40 percent of the crowd was rooting for Jake. The Lovely

Elizabeth was a no-show. Grade: B-

3. Irwin R. Shyster defeated The Big Boss Man in 8:33. Again, not bad while it lasted, but just too short. Grade: C+

4. Chris Walker defeated Hercules in 10:15. Walker actually looked pretty good, but Ric Flair would have a tough time carrying Herc to a decent match. One fan in back of me missed the ring introduction and thought Walker was Van Hammer. They do look a lot alike. Grade: D-

5. The Undertaker defeated Sid Justice by disqualification in 7:27. There were lots of choke holds, but the sight of these two guys in the ring is simply amazing. Sign of the night said, "Move over Hulkamania, it's time for Justice." Sid got a huge babyface pop despite his slight turn on Hulk Hogan the night before in the Royal Rumble. Grade: C+

6. Tatonka defeated The Warlord in 11:50. Of all the matches, why did this have to be the longest of the night? Grade: F.

7. Roddy Piper defeated The Mountie in 10:45 to retain the Intercontinental title. Piper got a huge babyface pop. Jacques Rougeau gave us three "I am The Mountie" cheers. Grade: B-

Notes: A very vocal crowd of 6,200 attended. I'm sure the crowd was helped by a full-color spread and story in *The Tennessean* in the Sunday paper ... The announced 15-minute intermission actually ran 25 ... The WWF returns March 8 with Undertaker-Flair vs. Hogan-Piper.

Editor's note: The article, which was enclosed with Mattos's results, was your typical WWF puff-piece written by *Tennessean* staff writer Ken Beck. Justice, who is originally from Twist, Ak., was quoted extensively in the story. "It's a different audience than 10 years ago," Justice said. "They saw fat, overweight guys out there bleeding over each other. Now we have more personality and take more pride in ourselves." Justice, 31, was described as a five-year WWF veteran who received tutelage from Tojo Yamamoto and idolized Savage. On the pay scale of a WWF wrestler, Justice said "49 of 50 of them are in the 33 percent tax bracket." WWF media director Steve Planamenta said most WWF wrestlers make in the low six-figures. None of the figures presented were too outlandish, except for the \$500 million the WWF is supposed to gross a year (it's more like \$125 million). But Beck attributed the figure to *Sports Illustrated*, another publication that doesn't understand pro wrestling. The most interesting quote was from Justice about real-life relationships with other wrestlers (keep in mind, this is prior to the show in Nashville on Jan. 20). "We're all together, away from home so much, but there's also a lot of jealousy. The guy I hate the most is Ric Flair, people like that, The Undertaker. I just don't agree with the things they agree on."

Xenophobia Boulevard winds through U.S. promotions

By PAUL HANLIN JR.
Three Count Columnist

This word just in: After a 47-year hiatus, war between the U.S. and Japan has resumed!

Verbal warfare, that is.

Is this the way it was way back when, before I was a gleam in my parents' eye? Two nations going hammer and tong at one another before the bombs

Paul Hanlin Jr.
From the Northeastern Lights

dropped?

They say one-third of our auto workers have a poor work ethic and are illiterate. We say they're destroying our market for anything and everything. They say our bosses are inferior to theirs. We make not-so-subtle noises about protectionism.

Can't anybody around here get along any more? And what in the world does this have to do with pro wrestling?

Easy. When all else fails, wrestling promoters capitalize on sentiments like these by trotting out the old stand-by. Japanese bad guy sent from the other side of the Pacific to undermine our way of life, complete with salt ceremony before the match, with the wrestler making sure he stashes a bit of salt in his trunks for the finish.

From Mr. Moto to Mr. Saito to The Great Muta and several dozen in between, Japanese wrestlers have been forced to put their exceptional skills on the backburner and revert to the plans that those who write the checks tell them to do. In other words, pander to the lowest common denominator.

Nationalism, via Xenophobia Boulevard.

Saito was an Olympic Games competitor in 1964. Jumbo Tsuruta, winner of the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter's* 1991 Wrestler of the Year (and the third Japanese to win in five years) also competed for his country in Munich 20 years ago. Yoshiaki Yatsu, now with Super World Sports, competed in the Montreal Olympic games in 1976, and won the Japanese freestyle wrestling championship while still with All Japan Pro Wrestling a decade later.

All Olympic-caliber talent, but Saito spent two decades in the U.S. playing the stereotypical, salt-throwing Japanese heel. Tsuruta won the AWA championship in 1984, went stateside for two tours and drew fair to mid-size house show crowds. Yatsu wound up in World

Class Championship Wrestling as part of Devastation, Inc., when it split into two factions -- one run by King Kong Bundy (and you never hear a word about Bundy anymore), the other by Scandor Akbar. The two groups feuded for a while in 1983.

The above-mentioned Japanese's talents were never truly shown to American audiences. Mute (Keiji Muto) was reduced to mist-spraying for most of his American stint, even though he was allowed to cut loose and show his stuff.

Why this reluctance bordering on paranoia by U.S. promoters to not let the fans decide for themselves who they like or not, instead of attempts to guide them in the obvious direction? The same reason Vince McMahon Jr. exploited a Middle East war last year. For profit; for (fill-in the nation) bashing; to capitalize on the emotions of the moment.

But mostly because we, the wrestling fan, eats it up. We have met the enemy, and he is us ...

So in these trying times, how will Jushin Liger fare as he comes here for WCW on a regular basis? Will Big Dust (WCW booker Dusty Rhodes) paint him as a heel down the line? Will the audience that attends WCW shows, devastated by the near-depression we're in (thanks in large part to the guy who lives at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue) boo anyone who calls Japan home?

I wonder the same of Muto, who might finally be coming in as NWA champion when WCW executive vice president Kip Frey and Co. finally get the NWA title back and the inevitable unification match between Muto and Sting occurs on pay-per-view, perhaps as early as this summer? Will WCW have the gullions (local Philadelphia slang for guts) to push Muto as a great worker, or will they go the route of their brothers in the wrestling promotion business before them and take the easy way out? It will surely be that way in mid-February in Albertsville, France, as U.S. and women's world figure skating champion Kristi Yamaguchi and Japan's Midori Ito battle for Olympic gold. Count on it.

We'll take it out on the messenger, when a little introspection would reveal that maybe some of what they say hits a lot closer to home than we care to think. Or admit.

Me thinks the Ugly American image will be entrenched, big-time, before we bid adieu to '92.

And for wrestling, business as usual.

Mulligan, Clean begin IWF feud; Willets appearing on LMLW card

By Alex Marvez
Three Count Editor

Eddy Mansfield's International Wrestling Federation taped five hours of television shows Feb. 1 from Universal Studios in Orlando. Highlights of the shows:

- The Heartbreakers (Big Til and Tim "Powerhouse" Parker) dropped the IWF tag-team titles to The Long Riders. The finish came with a clean pin of Parker when he was tossed off the top rope from behind by Blackjack Mulligan and covered for the pin. Immediately after the cover, Mulligan and Champaigne Cain (The 'Breaker's manager) ran in the ring. Mondo Clean, the IWF's heavyweight champion, came out and at-

Alex Marvez Sunshine State News

tacked Mulligan, leaving him laid out in the ring.

That match became the focus of much of the next five hours of taping, as The 'Breakers made numerous run-ins on The Riders matches. Mulligan juiced on two separate occasions when attacked by Clean.

- The Dynamite Express and The Bad Boys had the best match on the show, highlighted by a Jushin Liger-like flip by the Express's Randy Rhodes outside the ring.

j • Thunder and Lightning, the group's former tag-team champions, emerged with new ring gear and face paint.

- IWF television champion Cliff Anderson is now programmed to feud with Chris "The Doctor" Proctor. In Proctor's first match back from a stab wound sustained last September in an out-of-the-ring incident, he went to a special five-minute draw with Anderson.

- Preliminary wrestler and WCW jobber Tony Mella had to be taken to the hospital for observation after complaining of chest pains following a tag-team match against Thunder and Lightning. X-rays on Mella, who took a very stiff elbow during the bout, were negative, and he was released. Mella also has wrestled as The Purple Terror and Java Rouk.

- Ring announcing chores were split between *Arena Report* editor Ron Lemieux and IWF legal counsel Chris Qualmann, who is probably hoping none of his friends in the legal profession will ever watch these tapes.

LMLW: Howard Brody's Ladies Major League Wrestling should have an interesting show March 2 at the Fort Lauderdale War Memorial. The show, dubbed "Hit Me With Your Best Shot," will feature Kathy Willets

as the guest timekeeper for the main event. Willets is the woman who gained national attention after having been accused of having sex with many prominent political and police figures in Broward County as part of a prostitution racket set up by her husband, a former Broward police officer. In related news, the show will also feature a performance by the Cheers cheerleaders and a three-round boxing exhibition by the Beverly Hills Knockouts. Line-up for the show has The Glamour Girls vs. Wendi Richter-Rockin' Robin, Bambi vs. Lady X (Peggy Lee Leather), Luna Vachon vs. Malia Hosaka, Candi Divine vs. Peneolope Paradise and Pink Cadillac (6-4, 238) vs. Susan Green (6-1, 220 - a protege of the Glamour Girls).

Tickets are \$20 ringside, \$15 reserved and \$10 general admission. A family pack is being offered as well, with two adult and up to four children's general admission tickets for \$30. Tickets are available at TicketMaster outlets or from Brody himself. *Three Count* readers are entitled to a \$5 discount on ringside or reserved tickets when bought from Brody, who can be reached at 305-981-1577.

- A correction from a few issues ago. Robin is the group's International champion and Bambi is the world champion.

Suncoast: A quick update on the progress of The Giant Outlaw's junior varsity basketball team. Bradenton Southeast High has opened the season 12-0, and is winning games by an average of 31 points. With the way the wrestling business is nowadays, maybe The Outlaw should pursue a career in NBA coaching than on the mat.

- A special thanks to Suncoast owner Henry Raines for sending me a preview to the WCW comic book, which debuts in March under the Marvel Comics line. The most highly touted wrestlers were Sting, Lex Luger, El Gigante, The Steiner Brothers, Ron Simmons and P.N. News. Luger is given top billing and compared to Doctor Doom, the famous arch-rival of the Fantastic Four. The monthly book is being written by Mike Lackey, who is working with Turner Home Entertainment, but is not trying to keep the book's storylines parallel to WCW's in-ring product (a pretty wise move knowing WCW's erratic, last-minute booking decisions). "It all moves so fast," Lackey said. "For instance, if we wanted to feature a feud between The Diamond Studd and The Z-Man, they may even be friends by the time the book comes out. So we'll try to keep the wrestlers' adventures separate from what's going on in real life. It will reflect the current trends, but won't follow them to the letter."

Guerrera makes Octagon submit twice; women appear on Lucha show

By Carlos Rey
Three Count Columnist

Welcome to another new feature of Three Count. This column will be dedicated to one of the most entertaining styles of wrestling today. Some of you are already familiar with Lucha Libre. To those who aren't, I hope this section will help provide an introduction and a better understanding. I am also new at this, so don't expect the professionalism of our editor or fellow columnist Paul Hanlin Jr. quite yet. But, as the weeks go by, I hope to be putting out a column worthy of this newsletter.

Lucha Libre is not your average wrestling by any means. It consists mainly of incredible acrobatic moves and colorfully masked wrestlers, although not all

Carlos Rey *Reporte de Lucha Libre*

wrestlers are masked. Most do start with masks after making a name for themselves, but eventually lose their masks. The wrestling style that most resembles the Lucha is the Japanese style, although upon close viewing one can see they are worlds apart because of the flying maneuvers and sequence of moves in a match. It is interesting to note that many Japanese stars spend time wrestling in Mexico before making it big in Japan. Mitsuhashi Misawa of All Japan Pro Wrestling is one such example.

The Lucha group EMMU is shown from 7-9 p.m. EST Sundays in the United States on Galavision. There is also the UWA, which can be picked up by satellite dish, but does not have a U.S. television outlet.

Results from the show held 1/31 at Arena Mexico (aired 2/2):

1. Mario Prado Jr. and Baby Richard (who are the *rudos*, or heels) defeated La Mascara and Super Gallo (the *technicos*, or babyfaces) via countout. This match had great bumps and airborne maneuvers, especially by La Mascara. The guy has a variety of holds that remind you of Jack Brisco, and he combines them with great acrobatics. Richard and Prado combine well as a heel team. Richard has won 36 hair vs. hair bouts. Super Gallo has a way to go, but overall, it was an enjoyable match.

2. Martha Villalobos and La Diabolica (*rudos*) defeated Cynthia Moreno and La Sirenita (*technicos*). This was one of the rare women's bouts shown on

Galavision. It never ceases to amaze me how quick and agile Villalobos is for her size. Villalobos and Moreno both come from well-known wrestling families. Moreno has worked a lot in Japan, and uses the style in her match. Also fast past and good.

3. Kato Kung Lee-Volador-Super Astro (*technicos*) defeated El Hijo Del Gladiador-Ponzonia-Kung Fu (*rudos*) It looks like they're building up to another feud between Kung Fu and Kato, just like they did in 1991, which ended in a hair vs. hair match that Kung Fu lost. Volador and Super Astro stole the show here, especially Astro.

4. La Fiera-Jerry Estrada-Bestia Salvaje (*rudos*) defeated El Hijo del Solitario-El Hijo del Blue Demon-Hurricane Sevilla (*technicos*; *El Hijo* means son on) in two straight falls via submission. In Mexico, submission finishes are quite common, with every wrestler giving up on a fairly frequent basis (even the top stars). This was full of brutal action with plenty of brawling. Estrada and La Fiera complement each other well, and Salvaje has come a long way. Estrada, Salvaje and La Fiera completely dominated the match.

5. Fuerza Guerrera-Blue Panther-El Satanico (*rudos*) defeated Canadian Vampire-Octagon-The Ultimate Dragon (Yoshihiro Asai) when Guerrera made Octagon submit the second and third falls. This was the most action-packed match on the show, with great flying moves one after the other. Guerrera and Panther are regarded as two of the best luchadores, and nobody beats Satanico in the brawling category. As for the babyfaces, the crowd went nuts for The Dragon, which he well deserves. They seem to be building to some kind of match between Octagon and Guerrera.

It was a very enjoyable show, I'd say the best on television this week from any North American promotion. See you next week.

Desire any wrestling memorabilia? Interested in video tape of old matches or those from other parts of the country or world? Advertise here for free for subscribers only at P.O. Box 12795, Gainesville, Fla. 32604-0795. I'm also looking for results and/or analysis of matches from other arts of the country. Please send them to the above address.

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Spotlight on: Steve Beverly

After more than three-and-a-half years as publisher of Matwatch, Steve Beverly has removed himself from the wrestling newsletter business. "It's a young man's game," Beverly said after announcing his intention of ceasing publication last fall.

But for an old man, Beverly handled himself just fine. Matwatch reached more than 1,400 subscribers during its publication, which ceased Jan. 27, and was highly respected for Beverly's opinions and knowledge of the television world -- an aspect he was able to add a special insight to. As the news director of WBBJ-TV in Jackson, Tenn., a former television anchorman/news reporter and possessor of a master's degree in broadcasting from Auburn, Beverly became the leading critic on wrestling promotions' television production and television ratings.

Beverly won't be disappearing from the wrestling world, either. He will retain his 900-number spot with World Championship Wrestling on Tuesday nights (1-900-909-9900), and will continue to publish his weekly wrestling column in The Columbus Ledger-Enquirer. In this interview segment, Beverly expresses his views on WCW's management and how he entered the "insiders" wrestling scene.

AM: What's it like to be a free man?

SB: It's hard to say, because it's only been one weekend so far. But I will tell you I really enjoyed the weekend. It was refreshing not to have to meet that Monday morning deadline for a change, and whatever I did at was at my own pace. I did watch some wrestling, but it was for enjoyment instead of for Lines of the Week or tidbits of the production of their shows for review. It was much more for my own entertainment. It was a change, and it was kind of nice.

AM: How are you going to view wrestling now that *Matwatch* has closed. Can you go back to watching wrestling strictly as a fan?

SB: I don't know if I can ever go back to watching as just a casual fan. Maybe if I went away for four or five years and came back, possibly. But who knows how wrestling will have changed in that length of time. I don't know if it can go back to the way it used to be for me in the way people go just to enjoy the sheer entertainment and contest of it. For one who has been in my profession and had a newsletter, it is hard not to be analytical about wrestling from either a creativity or philosophy standpoint. I think that stems from newsletter writers being much like scientists, who are constantly researching for the one break through that ultimately makes their facet of science better for people. I think that's what newsletter writers are. Newsletter writers are not brain surgeons, but their constantly on the search for what would make wrestling better for the audience. I don't know if any of us who ever do this can ever go back to "the way it was."

AM: When did you first start watching wrestling, and how did you learn about the "inside" aspects of the business?

SB: I became hooked back in 1965, when Lou Thesz was still the world champion. The first wrestling I ever saw was Championship Wrestling from Florida, and there was a wrestler who went by the name of Klondike Bill. He was the next big star coming in, and when I tuned in, he was in the process of having a two-

ton rock broken over his chest with a sledgehammer by the late wrestler Ronnie Etchinson. They talk about gimmicks today ... This was a lot more primitive, but it was an attempt to get over the phenomenal strength of this log-rolling Alaskan. It was fascinating to watch that. Week after week, this guy would do more amazing feats, and I began to see how the characters developed. Suddenly, I had developed a set of favorites and a set of guys who I wanted to see get beat. I didn't realize I was watching the unfolding of a sports soap opera. That's what it is.

I eventually realized the whole thing was not "real." I began to get suspicious when I was living in Lake Ross, Ga., and used to get both the Atlanta (Georgia Championship Wrestling) and Tampa (CWF) shows on cable. Louie Tillet and Tarzan Tyler had just finished a monstrous feud in Atlanta, in which Louie ran Tarzan out of Georgia. Ten days later in Florida, the guys are teaming up in Tampa as the best of buddies. Something said in my mind that it wasn't right. I began to really be convinced on the day after Jack Brisco won the world title, and I was watching from Jacksonville. The CWF used to do pre-filmed wrap arounds to preview matches in various cities. After the first break of the week's show, they cut to Gordon Solie, who announced the new world heavyweight champion Jack Brisco would defend his title Thursday in Jacksonville against Buddy Colt. Something went off in my head saying, "Wait a minute. He had to have filmed this thing earlier in the week. How could he have known Brisco was going to be champion? This is not exactly real." I can see where it would be kind of disappointing to a degree, kind of like spoiling Santa Claus to smaller kids. It didn't spoil my interest, particularly watching the popularity of Ted Turner's Superstation grow being a Southerner. I continued to follow through my college years and my earlier years in the TV field.

When I moved to Columbus for my first commercial TV job in 1976, I got close to the local promoter,

Fred Ward. Up to that point, the way they gave wrestling results of the weekly cards on my station would be to phone in the results and run footage of matches the station had shot earlier in the evening. I happened to be working the night shift, and early on I told the sports director I know something about this stuff and why not let me try to do play-by-play. So we tried it once. I sat down on the set and was introduced as a wrestling aficionado. They showed clips of three matches totalling about 1:15. I started calling a phonetic play-by-play, stealing every Gordon Solie cliché there was. I said Dick Slater's face was a crimson mask and everything. After the sports guy pitched to the next story and they went to the commercial, the anchor and he started breaking up. It was a funny thing. I had no idea what the news director was going to say the next morning. He was rather grim, and didn't even particularly like sports. When he came in, he had an uproarious grin. He was laughing and said it was great. Apparently, my performance struck a chord in people who hated wrestling and thought I was putting it on. They thought I was playing it with a wink, saying it was a great joke. The people who were true wrestling fans at the arena every week thought I was on another level. They thought it was a great, serious commentary of the stuff.

Even though I was a serious news reporter, I got a core of serious response from those 11 p.m. telecasts. If one week I was gone, on vacation or sick, the station got flooded with calls wanting to know where I was. I wasn't making much money in 1976, about \$165 a week, but I was learning and it was fun. I went across the street to work over at the ABC station the next year and became their prime-time anchor. But part of the deal they wanted was for me to still do the wrestling play-by-play on Wednesday nights. When they aired the video tape, they would insert a little circle at the bottom of a picture getting my reaction to what was going on the screen. It was like watching somebody call dog racing.

I did this for several years, and it was great fun. I never lost my zest and enthusiasm. I miss those days, because I don't think there will ever really be again the intimacy of what wrestling was when you would go to the local arena every week and catch up with the soap opera. There was something to be said about "our wrestlers" in a certain territory. I miss those days tremendously. The idea won't financially work anymore. People's expectations are too much because of what they've seen on television for free, and they aren't going to come out to the matches anymore. Before, I would meet people from all walks of life at the matches. I would see doctors, lawyers, people from the mill portion of town ... One of the great memories from my years in Columbus was my friendship with Lillian Carter because of wrestling. Even after her son, Jimmy, had gotten elected as president, she would still go to the matches,

because it was great fun. She never missed a match at the Columbus Municipal Auditorium until her health failed to the point she couldn't go. She would always have her assistant attend with her. The assistant would talk about how she would come home black and blue on the knees, because Lillian had beaten her down because she was so enthused by the matches. Lillian would always have a ringside seat in the third row, and we would get together and talk before the matches, especially about Mr. Wrestling II. That was her absolute favorite. Before Jimmy was inaugurated, the Georgia state patrol accompanied Wrestling II to meet her and have dinner at the Carter home. It was a major news story, with AP carrying a picture of Carter putting Wrestling II in a headlock. I remember seeing Wrestling II feuding with the Masked Superstar, and she took that very seriously. She really did believe. She said, "Steve, Wrestling II has got to win this week. He can't go on without giving us what we want to see."

AM: What led to you starting *Matwatch*?

SB: I went back to work on my master's degree at Auburn University. I wanted to do something different as my thesis, not just try to obtain another research bid for a thesis on television news. I wanted to do something enriching for me, and there hadn't been that much research done yet on pro wrestling. I wasn't sure the thesis committee would allow me to do something like that. I was writing my first paper in one of my graduate courses on the subject, and the professor stopped me in mid-flight. He told me the groundwork had been laid for a thesis. I ended up finding three professors who would go for it. It wound up being a 220-page book-length piece tracing the history of pro wrestling on TV from 1941 to 1989.

While researching, I met up with Gordon Solie and Joe Pedicino in Atlanta for a couple of tapings of *Pro Wrestling This Week*. Joe showed me a couple of newsletters, and said I ought to try something like this. He said he bet I could do something different than what was coming out, because of my knowledge of television and the need for this with so much wrestling on TV exploding. Heaven forbid, in 1985, independent TV stations across the country were stripping different shows every night. *Matwatch* started with four weeks of issues going to seven guys I knew for most of my life that were fans. I wanted to try it out on them and ask how they thought it worked. They said I should go for it. By the time I got to my fifth issue, I told Dave Meltzer, who I had met by telephone in the midst of doing my research, that I was going to try to produce a newsletter and if he might make a mention of it in his *Wrestling Observer*. Little by little, people started subscribing. My wife, who is a total non-fan but supportive of my product, said she cannot believe people in the U.S. would pay money for that kind of stuff. But when she saw the money coming in, she

didn't really complain. It really took a year and a half before it really became a mushrooming thing. Little by little, more people in the industry, either through direct subscription or bootleg copies, began to take note. One thing that helped get it off the ground was that I was within 90 minutes of the WCW office in Atlanta and an hour from the old Continental office in Montgomery when it had its last big hurrah with Eddie Gilbert as booker. I was able to be close when Turner took over the Crockett office, and developed a relationship with Steve Chamberlain of Turner Home Entertainment and Jack Petrick of TBS. I was able to get in on how the transaction developed. It opened a lot of doors, and I was able to meet different people in the process.

AM: Do you see the day when there will be mainstream acceptance of newsletters?

SB: I see the day coming ... if wrestling survives and maintains mainstream interest. You've got to look at how far the industry has come in the past few years. The mere fact the big two companies even acknowledge the newsletters out there and respond to their questions, whether they tell the truth or not, is a major step for them. The old line promoters hated them so bad they refused to do that. When I talked to one old-time promoter, who will remain anonymous, at length on his philosophy on newsletters last year, he said every now and then he would get a call from a newsletter person. Anybody who started a conversation with, "Meltzer says this," would have the conversation ended.

You can see the difference from the old-line promoters in the business and the new people. Heaven forbid, we've seen more people within this industry take a chance and allow themselves to be quoted who never thought of doing that before. Even though he had fallen out of the mainstream of the industry and had an axe to grind, you would have never seen Billy Graham five, six, seven years ago turning to a newsletter to tell his story. Or an Eddie Gilbert talking to somebody like yourself or John Arezzi, calling for the ouster of the vice president of a wrestling company. That used to be suicide in this business. But I don't think Eddie is dead, because of the different philosophy from the younger people in the business. I recently was talking to Eddie, and he said more of the younger wrestlers, as they mature in the business, will probably have a greater acceptance for newsletters. When they have a mainstream following, more of the wrestlers won't feel the traditional way of wrestling being a closed shop and will realize the term "protect the business" is outdated. Anybody who still believes that is the most naive person in the world, and it's not because of the newsletters. In 1985, when Eddy Mansfield told his story on 20/20, there was no other way to expose the business any greater than that. Millions and millions of people watched that broadcast, and the year it aired turned out to be one with

the biggest number of ticket sales in the history of business. You saw wrestling exposed in a graphic sense on one of the most watched TV programs.

As more of the younger guys get in the field, they will recognize it's not like it used to be, where you were trying to fool guys who came in from the farms. I can't predict when, but there probably will be mainline acceptance of a newsletter. More of us are now quoted in mainstream newspapers when writers are looking for an independent opinion on the sport. You've been on Entertainment Tonight, I've been quoted in national papers, Dave is going to be on 20/20, and was a columnist in The National. To a degree, there's already been an acceptance. It's natural evolution.

The overriding question is will wrestling survive as a mainline sport, or will it kill itself off because of so many scandals. Maybe it's one of those things you can't kill off, but I thought the same of the variety show and the Western. I think if it does, it will kill itself off of TV rather than as the art form of wrestling. Wrestling in and of itself is its own worst enemy, because national promotions chew up so much of the talent and wear the performer's well past their welcome, much more than what used to happen in the regional territories. This profession has been hot shotted to the point there are very few shocks left. The only thing they haven't done is commit a murder, and I don't want to suggest they do that. We've seen a guy bitten by a cobra, one fried in an electric chair, Eddie Gilbert hitting Jerry Lawler with his car ... all of this within the past two years. There's nothing left of shock value. We've seen more men hitting women, with Eric Embry performing a near rape on television last Saturday on TV that was the culmination of his embarrassing career. What's left? Having one wrestler holding another wrestler in the ring with a gun. And there's not much to raise our level of expectations. You can't have a mad Russian gimmick anymore. The economic thing with Japan doesn't draw wrestling heat. They've tried it a couple times, like with The Four Horsemen being bought by Hiroshima Ltd. in 1989, and it didn't work. Wrestling is never going to have another Hulk Hogan per se, and when they've tried to clone him, it has failed. There's not a whole lot left on the horizon. Wrestling has to cool off creatively. It's already cooled off at the gate. It needs to let the audience have a little time to breath. If it doesn't, it's in severe danger of swallowing itself up.

AM: You seem to be the only person who can get a hold of Petrick (the president of WCW). What is he like, and why doesn't he speak to the wrestling press?

SB: I don't talk to him often, but usually when it's real essential, he will return my calls. I guess I developed a relationship of trust early on when TBS first bought the company, and he asked me about the things he needed to do when he first started. He asked me to

come to a meeting on a Monday morning, and I was there for three hours. I reflected the view of what the hard-core fan wanted to see and hadn't been seeing for a few years with the NWA. Jack is very, very busy. One reason he is so hard to reach is in part because of the broad range of responsibilities he has within TBS. He is the chairman of the board of Turner's programming services, which deals with syndication. He's president of the wrestling end of the company. Four very significant divisions of TBS report to him, and he's also on the board of directors for Turner himself. He makes a number of trips throughout the country and Europe as far as selling various TBS products on the international front, including movies. Wrestling is important, but it's just one facet of his job. A lot of times he's hard to reach because he's so involved in so many other activities.

AM: He's come under a lot of criticism for many of the problems WCW has experienced. Should he play a more active role in the wrestling product?

SB: I'm not so sure he should. Jack's role is like that of many Chairmen of the Boards or super executives. His job is to try and find the right people who can run it. He does check in on wrestling on a day-to-day basis. Not everyday necessarily, but enough to keep up with what's going on. I very much think that is the Turner philosophy -- find people who can interface well in corporate atmospheres. They are not the old wrestling scenario run by mom and pop. There are several different divisions WCW has to interface with. It's a lot more complicated than Vince McMahon's company. Some of the criticism he has received has been unfair, because he can't be involved on a day-to-day basis. I think there are a number of things he has learned, and I think he would tell you readily that he was not that knowledgeable when he first started out and he still has a lot to grasp. There were a lot more frustrations with this company than other phenomenally successful divisions. I think he recognizes the mistakes that are made, but like anyone else, he can make mistakes. (Former WCW executive vice president) **Jim Herd** had a quick trigger finger. Jack follows more of the Turner philosophy, which gives everybody the chance to prove their worth on the job. He gave Jim the three years his contract called for, and they turned out to be very controversial years. I'm sure the situation (Herd's resignation) was not easy for him, because they had been friends for 20 years. But I'm sure he knew the change had to be made, if nothing more than for moral reasons. Some are criticizing Jack because he didn't bring in **Bill Watts** or a major wrestling name to take Herd's job. But whoever the WCW executive vice president is doesn't have to be a wrestling name. He has to be someone who looks after the company on a day-to-day basis. I don't know **Kip** (Frey, new WCW executive VP) well at all. I've talked to him once. But I've heard a lot of positive things. He apparently has a lot of confi-

dence in letting people do their jobs and prove their worth, rather than what happened with Herd. I read a newsletter that described Herd as an orchestra leader who tried to play all the instruments. I think Kip will just be an orchestra leader, except he wants his notes in tune. I expect if some people don't reach some kind of harmony or symphony, they will be replaced in the chairs. I don't think he will rule by fear, like the boss Herd was.

AM: In regards to what you said a minute ago, you said the Turner philosophy was to let people do their jobs and then judge their performance. Yet Herd was exactly the opposite, seemingly hiring and firing bookers on a six-month basis. Why didn't Petrick step in, and whose decisions were these?

SB: It's hard to say. I think Jim made most of the choices, although I think, even though it's never been said one way or the other and no one would not go to the extent of confirming it, that Jack Petrick pulled the string that brought **Ole Anderson** in. The fact is, the Herd and Anderson relationship was never good, despite Herd trying to put a public face forward that painted a good picture of it. It was a rocky relationship to start with. Ole told me four or five months ago that he gave up on the job after two weeks, because he saw they weren't going to be able to work together. Some say Ole's ideas, in the long haul, were the most damaging of any bookers in the Turner stewardship. It took a long time for them to dig out of the hole they were in and renew viewer confidence. I think they had to pull the trigger at the point they did, because Herd was never comfortable with that relationship. I think Herd was the one who pulled the trigger to get rid of him.

If one believes what I've been told by several sources about Herd's parting shots to the people on the steering committee, Herd had been convinced that **Dusty Rhodes** was the right person to bring back to that organization last January, because Herd really teed off on Rhodes, saying that he was the biggest disappointment to him in the three years he was in the company, because he put a lot of faith in Rhodes to improve business at arena shows and restore the group to respectability. Herd castigated that he was not successful at all at that. I think he put a lot of faith in Dusty, either having been convinced by some others or something. There's no question he pulled the string on getting Dusty off TV as a commentator. There was an unanimous feeling that had to stop. A lot of Turner programming officials were very unhappy when he did that Bull Drop Inn segment. There was also a lot of very negative response to his work at the color mike, although to be very blunt, he would have never been a first-rate announcer, but he tried and improved as he went along. At first, he did try to make himself the star of the show, but he got rid of some of the old Dusty cliches in later shows.

There was a lot of inconsistency in the decision-

making processes. Petrick tried to give Jim room to do his job. Who knows whether that's justified or not. Some feel Jack should have come down a lot harder on Jim a lot sooner and gone in a different direction, but he felt he had to honor his commitment. That's the history of the Turner organization, even if the road gets rocky. They've got a man now who comes up more through the Turner ranks. This is Kip's chance to demonstrate his ability as an executive. And don't think if he's successful that he'll be the wrestling chief forever. If he does well, I think better things are in store for him in the Turner organization.

Next issue: A complete report from the Committee on Regulated Industries meeting in Tallahassee regarding pro wrestling regulation, the final part of *Three Count's* interview with David Shults, a live report from WCW's February 7 show in Jacksonville, more details on the arrest of Curtis Hughes, a Lucha Libre column by Carlos Rey and a lead column by Paul Hanlin Jr. As you've probably noticed, this issue was 10 pages. That is permanent, as is a Tuesday/Wednesday mailing date each week (no more floating). With the addition of Carlos, a long-time Lucha aficionado, and a Memphis column by Charlie Mattos beginning in next issue, there should be more than enough copy for a 10-page issue each week. Carlos also has Lucha tapes available for those of you who don't see the weekly Galavision show already. Send a self-addressed stamped envelope to 996 W. 45th PL, Hialeah, FL 33012.

I am hoping to purchase a photo scanner sometime in March that will allow the easy installation of pictures ala Wade Keller's *Pro Wrestling Torch*. My schedule right now does not allow me to tinker with the new format I was hoping to present in January. I would like to sincerely apologize for those of you awaiting delivery of back issues. The situation, as currently planned, has everything being shipped on February 6. Please continue spreading the word about *Three Count*. My subscription base has tripled since publication began in September, and I can't thank y'all enough.

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